

Message Text

SECRET

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16

ACTION EA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1420

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 4324

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, SN, RP

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE SALE OF M-16 RIFLES TO PHILIPPINES

REF: A. MANILA 12122 (NOTAL)

B. MANILA 12159 (NOTAL)

C. SINGAPORE 4136 (NOTAL)

D. SINGAPORE 4161 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: FOR REASONS SET FORTH BELOW, I BELIEVE IT IS
ESSENTIAL THAT WE MAKE CLEAR TO THE GOS AT THE MINISTERIAL
LEVEL THAT WE ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED OVER THE RECENT GOS
ACTION IN SELLING 10,000 M-16 RIFLES TO THE PHILIPPINE GOVERN-
MENT WITHOUT OUR PRIOR CONSENT. I PLAN TO RAISE THIS MATTER
WITH DR. GOH NEXT WEEK POINTING OUT OUR CONCERN, THE POSSIBLE
EMBARRASSMENT AND CONSEQUENCE IF THE SALE WERE TO LEAK TO THE
NEWS MEDIA AND THAT ANY RECURRENCE COULD ONLY HAVE ADVERSE
CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR OTHERWISE FAVORABLE RELATIONSHIP IN THE
SECURITY FIELD. END SUMMARY.

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1. SINCE MY RETURN TO SINGAPORE I HAVE REVIEWED THE REFERENCED

TELEGRAMS CONCERNING THE GOS SALE AND SECRET TRANSFER OF 10,000 M-16 RIFLES TO THE PHILIPPINES WITHOUT ADVANCE U.S. CONCURRENCE, AND HAVE CONCLUDED THAT IF WE SAY NOTHING MORE TO THE GOS ON THIS SUBJECT OUR SILENCE COULD BE MISINTERPRETED AS ACQUIESCENCE TO WHAT WAS A DELIBERATE AND SERIOUS BREACH OF A MUNITIONS CONTROL LICENSING REQUIREMENT.

2. IF THIS SALE WERE TO BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE IT COULD NOT ONLY CREATE DISCORD WITHIN ASEAN, BUT COULD ALSO EMBARRASS OUR RELATIONS WITH THE MALAYSIAN AND INDONESIAN GOVTS, WHICH WOULD PRESUMABLY BE UPSET THAT SINGAPORE HAD PROVIDED AMERICAN WEAPONS WHICH MIGHT BE USED AGAINST MUSLIM INSURGENTS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. IF THESE RIFLES ARE USED IN OPERATIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES, WE MUST ANTICIPATE THAT A FEW OF THEM WOULD FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE INSURGENTS. IF THE PAF HAS NOT TAKEN THE PRECAUTION TO REMOVE OR OBLITERATE THE "MADE IN SINGAPORE UNDER COLT LICENSE" STAMP FROM THE BARREL, THE INSURGENTS WOULD PROBABLY PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION TO THE NEWS MEDIA AND CHARGE SINGAPORE AND THE U.S. WITH INTERVENTION IN PHILIPPINE INTERNAL AFFAIRS. ALTHOUGH THE MODERATE ELEMENTS WHICH CONTROL THE GOM AND GOI WOULD PROBABLY ACCEPT OUR EXPLANATION THAT THIS SALE OCCURRED WITHOUT OUR KNOWLEDGE, EXTREMIST AND/OR IRRESPONSIBLE ELEMENTS COULD CLAIM THAT THE U.S. HAD SECRETLY CONNIVED WITH THE GOS TO USE SINGAPORE AS A CONDUIT FOR PROVIDING AMERICAN WEAPONS TO BE USED AGAINST MUSLIMS IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES. THUS I THINK IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE DELAY NO LONGER IN MAKING IT CLEAR TO THE GOS AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL THAT THE REQUIREMENT FOR APPROVAL BY THE USG PRIOR TO SELLING OUR WEAPONS TO THIRD COUNTRIES IS NOT A MINOR TECHNICAL CLAUSE OF LITTLE SIGNIFICANCE, BUT ONE WHICH WE TAKE VERY SERIOUSLY.

3. ONCE SINGAPORE COMPLETES EQUIPPING ITS OWN ARMED FORCES AND STOCKING ITS OWN RESERVES WITH M-16 RIFLES, IT WILL BE INCREASINGLY CASTING ABOUT FOR POSSIBLE SALES TO THIRD COUNTRIES. SINCE SINGAPORE APPEARS TO BE DEVELOPING A CLOSER MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PHILIPPINES, THE REPETITION OF SUCH A VIOLATION CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED. THEREFORE, EVEN IF THERE IS LITTLE WE CAN DO TO REMEDY THIS SITUATION, WE SHOULD AT THE VERY MINIMUM TRY TO PREVENT ANY RECURRENCE OF SUCH A FLAGRANT BREACH OF AGREEMENT.

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4. AS WE HAVE STUDIED THE VARIOUS DETAILS INVOLVED IN THIS CASE, MY STAFF AND I HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY PERSUADED THAT THE DECISION TO MAKE THIS SALE WAS DIRECTED BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, DR. GOH KENG SWEE, AND POSSIBLY WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE AND APPROVAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET. THERE HAVE BEEN OTHER MINOR EPISODES DURING RECENT MONTHS IN WHICH DR. GOH HAS APPARENTLY MADE SNAP DECISIONS WITHOUT COORDINATING HIS

ACTIONS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT (ESPECIALLY WITH MFA). OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUES HAVE NOTED THE SAME TENDENCY IN SOME OF THEIR DEALINGS WITH DR. GOH. I AM INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT IF GOH HAD CONSULTED WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM OR THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE M-16 SALE, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN ACUTELY AWARE OF THE POSSIBLE FOREIGN-POLICY IMPLICATIONS INVOLVED AND WOULD HAVE EXERCISED A RESTRAINING INFLUENCE.

5. I AM RELUCTANT TO TAKE THIS MATTER UP WITH EITHER THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OR THE PRIME MINISTER BECAUSE SUCH A COURSE COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR VERY FAVORABLE RELATIONS WITH DR. GOH, WHO CONTINUES TO BE VERY RECEPTIVE TO U.S. NAVY REQUIREMENTS IN SINGAPORE. MOREOVER, SINCE HE IS A BLUNT AND RATHER DIRECT MAN, I THINK HE WOULD PERSONALLY APPRECIATE OUR TAKING UP OUR COMPLAINTS DIRECTLY WITH HIM. THEREFORE, UNLESS OTHERWISE DIRECTED I PLAN TO RAISE THE MATTER WITH DR. GOH NEXT WEEK, POINTING OUT TO HIM: (A) THE SERIOUSNESS OF THIS BREACH OF THE LICENSING AGREEMENT; (B) THE POSSIBLE EMBARRASSMENT TO THE USG IF NEWS OF THE SALE WERE TO LEAK OUT; (C) THAT IF THIS SALE WERE TO BE PUBLICIZED THE USG WOULD HAVE TO STATE THAT WE HAD NOT CONSENTED TO IT; AND (D) THAT ANY REPETITION COULD ONLY HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE OTHERWISE FRUITFUL AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SINGAPORE IN THE SECURITY FIELD.
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